



MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

**NOAA
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION**

JUNE 2003

GLOUCESTER, MA OFFICE, ONE BLACKBURN DRIVE, GLOUCESTER, MA 01930

SALT MARSH RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

The Habitat Conservation Division (HCD) staff participated in a salt marsh restoration and management workshop coordinated by the New Hampshire Coastal Program and the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. The impetus for the workshop was rapidly developing controversy over the appropriateness of particular methods (e.g., panne and pool creation, ditch plugging, etc.) for restoring salt marsh functions and value. The workshop was separated into two parts: A morning session designed to provide resource agency staff and stakeholders information regarding current marsh restoration practices; and to act as a forum for open discussion. Three speakers provided insight from diverse backgrounds, including research and industry. The afternoon session focusing on salt marsh considered restoration or management activities. Based on the on-site review, concepts were developed by groups followed by open discussion. Consistent with the morning sessions, opinions on the appropriate action varied tremendously, from no action to large scale manipulation. The end result of this workshop was not to create consensus but rather to generate discussion on a hot topic. A follow-up meeting will hopefully occur to revisit existing projects and new research information.

(sean.mcdermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)

SEASONAL DEPLOYMENT OF AQUACULTURE GEAR IN A DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

HCD staff conducted an on-site evaluation of eelgrass within the footprint of a proposed educational aquaculture facility in Pleasant Bay off Cape Cod. Eelgrass was identified along the perimeter and scattered within the project's footprint. The site was noted to have significant tidal currents, resulting in the potential for rapid shifts in eelgrass distribution. The project was approved by the resource agencies with the condition that the location of seasonally deployed aquaculture gear will be dependent on the results of annual eelgrass surveys. Because the project will only encompass a small portion of the permitted area and the aquaculture gear will be deployed/removed seasonally, the applicant will have the ability to relocate the gear to avoid impacts on eelgrass. (sean.mcdermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)

NEPA PROCESS FOR THE PROPOSED WISCASSET BYPASS DISCUSSED

The Federal Highway Administration hosted a meeting in Augusta, ME to discuss the NEPA process under which the proposed Wiscasset bypass project is currently being reviewed. For many reasons, the bypass between Wiscasset and South Newcastle, ME has been in review for many years and has generated much controversy. Because of this controversy, the resource agencies, including US EPA and USFWS, wanted to ensure the NEPA review was being observed and that all viable options were considered. The suite of alternatives for further evaluation has currently been narrowed down to four, including the “no build” option. At the center of the controversy is a proposed bridge over the Sheepscot River versus a longer upland route through undisturbed forest. HCD staff will provide comments on the environmental impact statement (EIS) and through the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) permit process.

(sean.mcdermott@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9113)

NANTUCKET SOUND CABLE CROSSING

HCD and Massachusetts state resource agencies met with representatives of Nantucket Electric regarding a proposed cable crossing from Nantucket, MA to Barnstable, MA. NMFS is concerned with potential impacts on fisheries habitat resulting from installation and maintenance of the cable. Specifically, the cable may impact valuable eelgrass beds which have been designated by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council as a Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) for summer flounder. A formal EFH assessment will be submitted for this project. (Chris.Boelke@noaa.gov, 978/ 281-9131)

JAMES J. HOWARD MARINE SCIENCES LABORATORY, HIGHLANDS, NJ 07732

NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY HARBOR - CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING

HCD staff from Sandy Hook along with HCD Headquarters and Congressional Affairs staff attended a congressional briefing in Washington, D.C. on the progress of the ACOE Harbor Deepening Project. The briefing was held in the Longworth House Office building and was hosted by Congressman Menendez (13th District, New Jersey). Congressmen Nadler (8th District, New York) and Frelinghuysen (11th District, New Jersey) also attended. Other attendees included representatives from the states of New York and New Jersey, New York City, the Port Authority, the ACOE and EPA. Colonel O’Dowd, the District Engineer of the New York District ACOE, provided an overview of the progress that has been made on the project and presented the congressmen with a schedule for project completion. Several issues that had the potential to slow the project’s progress such as air emissions offsets, dredge material disposal, and contract protests are being addressed. Last year, some entities involved in the project expressed concern about the seasonal dredging restrictions affecting the deepening schedule. Colonel O’Dowd made it very clear that NOAA Fisheries and the ACOE are coordinating on the issue and it has not affected the schedule. Coordination on all issues related to the deepening is ongoing, but the ACOE feels that the project should be completed on schedule. (**Stan Gorski, 732/ 872-3037 or Karen Greene, 732/ 872-3023**)

AMBOY AGGREGATES

HCD has provided the ACOE with comments on the proposed fisheries monitoring plan required

as a special condition of Amboy Aggregates, Inc. new permit to mine sand from a portion of the Ambrose Federal Navigation Channel over the next ten years. Comments on the plan were coordinated with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife. The comments involved refinements to the framework that the permit proposed. The monitoring will look at the relative abundance of adult winter flounder in the channel and shoal areas around the Ambrose Channel over the next three winters. **(Karen Greene, 732/ 872-3023)**

BARNEGAT BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

Now that the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) for the program has been signed, the focus of the program has shifted towards the implementation of the CCMP. The budget and the work plan were the main topics of the monthly meeting of the Management Committee. The Policy Committee had approved the proposed budget with some requested modifications designed to better target the implementation of the CCMP. The Management Committee referred the proposals back to the Scientific and Technical Committee for revisions. Also discussed was the recent designation of the Barnegat Bay as a "No Discharge Zone" by EPA. The program funded the development of the initial application. In addition, despite the torrential downpours, the Barnegat Bay Festival was a success. **(Karen Greene, 732/ 872-3023)**

DELAWARE BASIN FISHERIES

Stan Gorski attended the quarterly meeting of the Delaware Basin Fisheries Technical Committee on June 24 at the Delaware River Basin Commission offices in West Trenton, New Jersey. Some of the issues discussed were the recently completed Delaware River creel survey; the preliminary results of the uncompleted hydroacoustic survey of American shad and whether another survey should be undertaken next year without some method of validation; a proposal by Sunoco and Conoco to allow "beam leveling" or agitation dredging in place of extraction dredging at berthing areas along the river; the apparent disappearance of Atlantic sturgeon from the Delaware Estuary, a survey proposal by the USGS Fish Health Laboratory in Leetown, West Virginia to sample striped bass for mycobacteria; and New Jersey's proposed horseshoe crab harvest regulations. **(Stan Gorski, 732/ 872-3037)**

BP/AMOCO

As part of the Division's task to review a wide assortment of projects to bring more natural gas to Northeastern population centers, habitat staff met with state and federal agencies at a joint permit processing meeting in Trenton on June 11, 2003 to discuss a proposal for a facility to accommodate importation and regasification of liquefied natural gas supplies from non-US sources. Landside and marine facilities would be located on the Delaware River in Logan Township in the vicinity of the Logan Generating Station between Raccoon and Oldman's Creeks adjacent to the Marcus Hook anchorage. Logan GS would be able to provide power to vaporize and liquify gas without additional emissions. The site would require dredging of approximately 2-3 million cubic yards of sediment to a depth of 40-45 feet in the Delaware River. (anita.riportella@noaa.gov ,732/ 872-3116)

DOVER MUNICIPAL UTILITIES AUTHORITY- PELICAN ISLAND FORCE MAIN

Habitat staff met with state and federal agencies at a joint permit processing meeting in Trenton on June 11, 2003 to discuss a proposal to install a force-main under Barnegat Bay and Pelican

Island, Dover Township, Ocean County, NJ. The existing force main, located under Barnegat Bay, has been taken out of service due to leaks and infiltration. The proposed 3,500-foot force-main will be installed by directional drilling and will be located 20 to 30 feet below the benthic horizon of the bay, causing little disturbance. (anita.riportella@noaa.gov ,732/ 872-3116)

BURLINGTON ISLAND

Habitat staff met with state and federal agencies at a joint permit processing meeting in Trenton on June 11, 2003 to discuss a proposal to develop Burlington Island on the Delaware River for a multiple recreational use. The facilities would include a marina on a manmade lake within the island which would be opened up to the Delaware River. USFWS and NJFW are investigating possible conflicts with the project impacting bald eagles which are known to nest and forage in the area. (anita.riportella@noaa.gov ,732/ 872-3116)

MILFORD, CT OFFICE, 212 ROGERS AVENUE, MILFORD, CT 06460

MILFORD FIELD OFFICE WELCOMES NEW ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

We are happy to report that John Remlin, a business student at the University of Connecticut, will be our administrative assistant for the summer. John has made a quick transition to the vagaries of working for the Habitat Conservation Division. Welcome, John!

(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov; Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

NEPA DOCUMENT FOR LIS DREDGED MATERIAL DISPOSAL UNDER PREPARATION

The New England Region of EPA and the ACOE are finalizing a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) action regarding the possible designation of one or more dredged material disposal sites in the central and western basins of Long Island Sound (LIS). The action is required as LIS possesses a Marine Protection Research and Sanctuaries Act designation even though it is an inshore water. The special designation applies to all federal maintenance dredging actions and private sector dredging that require open water disposal of more than 25,000 cubic yards of sediment. Pressing against a disposal site closure deadline of February 2004, the NEPA documentation consolidates and highlights the extensive research and monitoring that has been directed toward dredged material relocation and management. Dating onward from the early 1970's, the insight garnered from dredging and disposal research in LIS has become the basis of the management and monitoring programs in use throughout the world. The dredging Area Monitoring System (DAMOS) program managed by the New England District is a major component of that effort. DAMOS has provided understanding and management options that allow better protections to aquatic resources and continued use of open water disposal. The NEPA document promises to be a very useful tool when released in the fall of this year.

(Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov , 203/ 882-6504)

SAINT LAWRENCE CEMENT UPDATE

Staff met in the field with representatives of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the ACOE, and project proponents to view the upland and waterfront portions of the project and also to discuss agency concerns for this industrial marina proposal. The ACOE is in the process of determining

how they will proceed with their project review, including how they will handle their evaluation of the issues pursuant to NEPA. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

RHODE ISLAND DREDGED MATERIAL DISPOSAL SITE UPDATE

The search for an open water disposal site in Rhode Island Sound is moving forward. After a year of focused data collection and evaluation, two regions in the Sound are being recognized as having a potential to accept a dredged material disposal site. Designating a dredged material disposal site would end an almost thirty-year lack of an approved, open water disposal site in the Rhode Island region. The closure of the Breton Reef Disposal Site in the Mid-1970s precluded the use of the seafloor for disposal of dredged material. Now, in the wake of the site selection of Site 69(b) for the Providence River Federal Navigation Project maintenance dredging effort (now ongoing), the state has obtained a state/federal cooperative investigation and advice regarding their waters with the intent of identifying and designating, if possible, one or more disposal sites. The process has brought together dredging experts, managers, and stakeholders to formulate options, criteria, and the nature and character of the information needed to advance the site identification and evaluation process. In the sixth of a series of meetings, the overview group was presented the results of their guidance. Presented in a GIS format with supporting documentation, fisheries presence, habitat functional values, and competing uses have been arrayed in data layers to screen possible sites. Chaired by Dr. Peter August of URI's Coastal Institute, the meetings and support information have been and will continue to be expanded on the Institute's web pages at < www.ci.uri.edu/Projects/DD/Docs/ >. The use of GIS as a decision making tool and foundation for discussions has shown another value to that technology. For more information check out the web site. (Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

NYSDOT PLANS RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BELT PARKWAY BRIDGE

Staff is reviewing the Essential Fish Habitat assessment for the subject bridge reconstruction project over Fresh Creek, a primary tributary of Jamaica Bay in Kings County, New York. The evaluation describes a preferred alternative of reconstructing and widening the bridge in place. Coordination with the involved action agencies is forthcoming. (Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

LONG ISLAND COASTAL EROSION UPDATE

The 83 miles of eroding southern shoreline along Long Island, New York extending from Fire Island Inlet to Montauk point have been the subject of more than forty years of discussions and start and stop investigations. The study area possesses virtually every type of coastal feature (save rocky escarpments) found along the US shoreline. In a series of innovative steps, the Cooperative Team of New York State, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of the Interior (National Parks and Fish & Wildlife), and NMFS has broken new ground in identifying assessment tools and decision making methodologies that should change the way both federal and state agencies address coastal erosion and the presence of the public in that zone. Starting with a focused evaluation of existing conditions and identifying the nature and extent of the reasonable options, a Vision Statement has been drafted that seeks support for a series of project advancement criteria. When the Vision Statement is signed, the parties will have a structure in which options can be advanced and assessed in a methodic and structured fashion. This should advance the group to a unified position and facilitate completion of the action plan. (Michael.Ludwig@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504)

EFH EVALUATION RECEIVED FOR BIG EGG MARSH RESTORATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

This proposed restoration project is intended to evaluate the use of spraying locally dredged material in a “thin layer” into a deteriorating Jamaica Bay marsh and subsequently reestablishing the vegetation cover. The New York Department of Environmental Conservation has documented that significant amounts of smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) have been lost in Jamaica Bay. Between 1924 and 1974, wetland loss was mostly due to dredging and filling; however, since 1974, wetland loss has accelerated, to the point that approximately 50 acres of established cordgrass is being lost per year. The proposed project entails approximately 4000 cubic yards of new work dredging from a created 20 foot wide by six foot deep channel and deposited in an approximately 2-acre parcel. The cordgrass is hoped to grow through 10 to 15 inches of material. Deeper sediment deposits are proposed to be planted. The overall plan includes a monitoring effort. If approved, this project would be the most northerly site that the “thin-layer” restoration method has been attempted in the Northeast US. Staff from the Milford, CT and Sandy Hook, NJ Field Offices will be coordinating on the project reviews.

(Diane.Rusanowsky@noaa.gov, 203/ 882-6504; Karen.Greene@noaa.gov , 732/ 872-3023)

OXFORD, MD OFFICE, 904 SOUTH MORRIS STREET, OXFORD, MD 21654

REHOBOTH, DE, SEWAGE OUTFALL

The public scoping process continues relative to relocation of the Rehoboth wastewater discharge. The current outfall is into Lewes-Rehoboth Canal. Although the discharge only contributes approximately 4% of the nitrogen loading to Rehoboth Bay, the outfall contributes as much as 75% of the phosphorous loading in summer months, resulting in Rehoboth Bay being one of the most eutrophic estuaries in the US. Alternatives to the current discharge practices under consideration are ocean outfall, land application, and groundwater injection. (Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5723)

REHOBOTH/DEWEY BEACH REPLENISHMENT (DE)

Maintenance of the beaches at the Rehoboth and Dewey resort communities requires 360,000 cubic yards of material every three years. However, the volume of material may be as much as one million cubic yards following a major storm. The Philadelphia District has conducted detailed studies to identify a suitable offshore borrow site that is not ecologically sensitive, such as Hen and Chicken Shoal (HCS), which was originally selected for dredging. HCS is Essential Fish Habitat for a number of managed species, including the sand tiger shark, a candidate species for listing under provisions of the Endangered Species Act. Additional benthic studies are to be conducted within a site named "Area G" so that impacts can be reduced further. (Tim Goodger, 410/ 226-5723)